GENDER AND MEDIATION: THE MALE FIGURE ON TELEVISION

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— Abstract—

Mass media are cultural industries of high consumption amongst Mexican population, becoming a reference to explain the popular culture and the social behavior. From them, television keeps going a high popular influence mass, from messages that seek to respond to the information and entertainment needs of all sectors. In matter of gender and cultural representation, the TV messages associate the masculine figure with the stereotype of the strong, successful and productive man, which ignores a reality of the masculinities in Mexico, transgress the human development and reinforces the inequity between man and women. This situation implies in a silent conflict that violence the Human Rights and the legal environment of the television as a media. That is why is necessary to rule the media and the message in order to transform the traditional structures of power in the democratic systems, taking the cognitive mediation as an alternative method of solution of controversies.

Keywords

Conflict; masculinity; television; cognitive mediation.

Masculinity and femininity are concepts that acquire meaning from the connections between each other, such as social delimitation and cultural opposition. In the case of masculinity, its traditional conceptualization is linked to power, so being a man means having and exercising power, with characteristics such as winning, ordering, achieving goals and being tough, even dominating women and other men.

The masculine demonstration of power means controlling feelings, emotions and emotional needs, to avoid the loss of control and control over others, and the fear of being attributed with feminine characteristics, which are absolutely rejected (Hardy and Jiménez, 2001).

Connell (2003) defines masculinity as a social and historical construction, changing from one culture to another, at different historical moments, throughout the course of each individual's life and between different groups of men according to their social class, race or ethnicity; it is based on physical values that are subsequently transformed into moral values, and that the family, school, media and society in general explicitly and implicitly teach the way in which the subject must think, feel and act as a man (Hardy and Jiménez, 2001).

The construction that Seidler (2000), Cruz (2006) and Montesinos (2005) make of masculinity, is associated with bodily and affective restriction; Corneau (1991) states that these prohibitions are demonstrative forms of masculinity among men. The media spreads this social construction from messages where the male is linked to power and alienated from affectivity, promoting the reproduction of behaviors that are framed in social gender prescriptions, in this regard, Metz notes "Mass communication, especially television, play a transcendental role in the construction of social identity; and their extraordinary diffusion, make them agents par excellence to institute and reaffirm imaginary that perpetuate the gender gaps" (2016: 2).

In that context, men constitute what Orozco (1997) defines as audience: cultural subjects capable of meaning their material and symbolic production, but also of reproducing without questioning the meanings offered in the media; this enables the influence between the receivers of the hegemonic models with which the male figures transmitted by the media are constructed.

This article presents a reflection on the representation of the male figure projected on Mexican open television, based on the exploration of the gender perspective, Human Rights and the Federal Radio and Television Law, to suggest the application of mediation cognitive that promotes more democratic television content on masculinities.

II. MASCULINITY AS A CONFLICT

Human beings form groups when interacting with others, and together they integrate society. Each group represents a culture that reflects and guarantees the permanence of their beliefs, values and actions, so that the multiplicity of conceptions of life makes possible the existence of conflicts.

Regarding gender, it is interesting to explore how each culture determines the recognition of human beings. On the one hand there is the essentialist approach that governs the vision of life based on differential characteristics delimited by biology, inheritance and evolution (such a system recognizes the existence of men and women), and on the other, the perspective of polarization that establishes two different but complementary sides: the masculine and the feminine (Rocha and Díaz, 2011). In Western contemporary society, the sociocultural representation of people is established from birth, considering the genitals of men or women to assign them the male or female gender.

Gender, as conceptualized by Lamas (2002, 2013), attributes feminine and masculine characteristics to each sex, based on the ideas that each culture establishes about sexual differentiation; this symbolic construction determines activities and behaviors for each individual. In turn, Connell (1997) states that gender configures social practice over time.

The concept of gender is used as a reference to determine identity, that is, what individuals decide for themselves when they are aware of their existence, even if it is socially imposed from birth. In the gender identity is the gender role, which are the tasks that each subject performs from their social construction. All these relationships about masculine and feminine are called gender culture.

> Gender culture refers to the set of norms, rules, expectations and myths that are transmitted in multiple ways and through different agents with the purpose of incorporating new individuals into society, ensuring their "optimal" functioning (Rocha and Díaz, 2011: 19).

The starting point of studies with a gender perspective is the recognition of the social and political subordination of women in a social system dominated by men. For Lagarde (1996), the gender perspective has as one of its aims to contribute to the subjective and social construction of a new configuration based on the re-signification of history, society, culture and politics from and with women and men.

> This approach seeks to provide the elements to analyze what happens to women and men of defined historical moments, in their precise generic relationships,

and also forms the conceptual frameworks in which societies and cultures are interpreted in a complex way: their organization and its imagery, its ritualization, its worldviews, its ideological forms and its forms of dominance, of meekness, of reproduction of the generic political order, of distancing from the canons, of rebellion and of construction of alternatives. And this ranges from personal and intimate relationships, to those that occur customarily and explicitly in the structures of civil society and the State (Caséz, 1998: 108).

The academic production on gender is based on the debate about the power, identity and structuring of social life (Tena, 2014; Castañeda, 2008; Olavarría, 2008); these studies favor interdisciplinary approaches that articulate contributions from large areas of knowledge of human and social sciences, such as sociology, historical analysis, political theory, anthropology, psychology and psychoanalysis (Bonan and Guzmán, 2007).

In the case of masculinity, conceptualizing it implies the risk of limiting it to a stereotype linked to social norms to be a man, excluding men who by decision or obligation do not agree with the traditional meaning of masculinity; including the recognition of multiple masculinities, such as transsexual, transgender, intersex, intergender identities, as well as those who make up vulnerable groups such as indigenous people, senior citizens and adolescents.

The social configuration of masculinity sets expectations of behavior among men, since it demands a constant demonstration of power; failure to do so would cause them a situation of vulnerability in the face of criticism from those who respond to social gender prescriptions.

There are men who even complying with the corresponding code of behavior, do not agree to be considered as the dominant gender because they affirm that there are actions that should not be exclusive to masculinity, but should be shared by the other gender[1], or they have the desire to get involved with tasks considered feminine[2].

Permanence and reproduction of this duality among the most recent generations, has caused what Bell (1987) calls "paradox of masculinity", which is that as men they are educated to maintain the social privileges

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1   Men of more recent generations are educated with a greater gender perspective, which makes them sensitive to the search for equity. They are individuals who observe that women around them have ventured into the work field, and that they carry out activities that were previously exclusive to men, such as engineering careers or trades related to construction and transportation.

2   The clearest example is paternity, a right that they have strengthened from the involvement of the male during pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum. More and more men are observed in the care of their children, they even carry out domestic activities such as cooperation for family education.

attributed to the masculine gender, but they are brought up with the idea of gender parity, provoking intrapersonal conflict to decide what is most appropriate for them in relation to women.

The dissident culture, made up of those who criticize polarization and who fight for gender diversity, communes with the idea that masculinity is not exclusive to men, as well as femininity towards women. There are masculine women and feminine men based on their personality characteristics and roles they play in the scenarios where they grow. This perception causes the existence of another conflict that is more of social construction: blindness regarding the construction of being masculine and being feminine.

Family and school, to mention two institutions, are socialization cores where the characteristics assigned to men and women are transmitted, a role that is reinforced, even distorted with mass media content.

In a semantic analysis of the male figure presented in print media, specifically in magazine advertising, the male is visualized as a superior subject, with symbols of power that support the social status acquired by the fact of being a man (Olarte and others, 2015). For Connell (1997) they are dominant men, *alpha males* who excel in a masculine world, where those who do not comply with the stereotype of the physically attractive, strong and successful man, alienate themselves from the privileged sphere to become subordinate and marginalized men, linked in many cases with expressions of femininity

It is appreciated that as men they have a stage in the public space to show themselves as such: they are on the lookout for women to conquer them, thereby fulfilling the requirement of being those who must court in an interpersonal love relationship (Olarte *et al.*, 2015).

Although they comply with stereotypes of western men, where thinness, white skin, height and physicality are privileged, it is broken by the belief of man who, being a man, strays from aesthetics and health. Men are shown as subjects who care about their body and physical appearance, their health and well-being; which is why the projected models are young adults, in good shape, which implies health care.

However worrying about health, and sometimes showing certain emotions, does not mean that they show emerging models of masculinity, because the sole care of the appearance, rather than imply wellness, connotes power, and with it, the reproduction of hegemony (Olarte *et al.*, 2015).

Another conflict is the ridicule media to which men who do not meet established expectations are subjected, since in many cases they are shown as effeminate subjects, degrading the female gender. In this configuration, very feminine, or transvestite men are perceived, linked to orientation and/or preference other than heterosexuality[3], which give guidance to think that a man with such an identity will always be like a woman.

Those figures of men with masculine characteristics that fulfill roles established since their birth by social gender prescriptions are set aside, and that partly respect the social norms of behavior, but have decided for themselves an orientation, preference and/or sexual identity other than heteronormativity, and therefore do not detract from their existence as a human being, as a person and as a male; however, when others know of such an identity, they are mostly targets of mockery that reflect an exacerbated machismo.

III. ESTERIOTYPES ON TELEVISION

Of the traditional mass media, television is the channel with the greatest social impact, despite the radio domain in semi-urban and rural areas, because its scope is recorded in urban areas[4].

According to the *National Time Use Survey (ENUT)* 2014, the inhabitants in Mexico of 12 years and more use some mass media, for an average of 13 hours per week (INEGI, 2015).

The *Media Performance Yearbook 2011* mentions that the degree of television penetration in homes is very high, since 98.8% have access to this media, in addition to 32.2% having Pay-Tv; there is also at least one television on for more than eight hours per day, and from Monday to Friday 78.5% of consumers tune in to open television channels, which drops to 72.9% on weekends. It is significant that 44% of people with local television spend more time watching open channels (IBOPE AGM Mexico, 2011).

Mexican television has two national channels that dominate the programming through their various channels, while in the closed system the number of television stations increases, they share the quadrant with foreign production. *Las Estrellas* is the channel that concentrates more than one fifth of the national audience, 15% is monopolized by Channel 5, 13% Channel 13, followed by Channel 7 with 9.3% and Channel 9 with 7.3%. The rest is distributed, in tiny fractions, on the other open television channels and between pay channels (IBOPE AGM Mexico, 2011).

Although there is a diversity of programs for all types of audiences, Mexican soap operas and series predominate in Mexican open television as forms of population entertainment.

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3   Heterosexuality is the orientation and/or preference that characterizes heteronormative society, as a must for men and women; for that reason it does not know the divergent identities.

4   Population in Mexico during 2010 was 112 million 336 thousand 530 inhabitants, of which 77.8% were located in urban areas, and 22.2% in rural areas (INEGI, 2011).

The *Media Performance Yearbook 2011* indicated that among the top fifteen places of preference in programming, ten were occupied by soap operas; in second order of preferences are sport events and news.

The most successful soap operas reach between 15 and 20% of the total rating, that is, the proportion of the audience that is watching a certain program, compared to the total of the potential audience, which in turn refers to the total number of households with television, whether or not they are on. These programs reach up to 40% rating when the population makes use of television at the time of counting (IBOPE AGM Mexico, 2011).

Such statistics show that television in Mexico does not respond to an educational interest but to lucrative purposes, whose consuming population has a preference for productions that make up or act on reality, with little importance for the facts that truly make sense of reality; that is, soap operas and talk shows have a higher rating than opinion programs.

Television could help work for education in the country, based on programs and messages that build knowledge for life. However, being part of a capitalist system, the television industry responds to interests of the high spheres that dominate programming, making this medium a tool of manipulation and social blindness.

> The educational potential of open television is broad, as demonstrated by the most developed countries in this area. The example of Europe is outstanding but the cases of Latin America (Chile, Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Uruguay) in which alternatives have been sought and achieved are no exception. Cable television also gives evidence that important market shares can be achieved with programs with a cultural and educational focus. It is above all a matter of defining priorities and substantive work in this area. But it can be done (Rodríguez, 2014).

As a means of socialization, television contributes to form identity, to establish culture, "to build its history from cultural processes as articulators of communication practices with social movements" (Martín-Barbero, 1991: 178).

Practices of men and women who seek gender equality constitute a social movement that has triggered facts to transform the reality of human relationships. It forces to review the history of how men imposed their presence in a patriarchal system and how women should be subordinate in quiet spaces; it boosts to travel the path of feminism to know the achievements of women and claim their role in society; invites us to reflect on the need to investigate men from perspectives that move away the stigma of being the victimizing figure.

From the academic field, the use of television is committed to educational purposes that promote human and community development. From a gender

perspective, the television message should reflect the parity between men and women, so that as a means of communication it disseminates democratic ideas in the generic relationship.

Unfortunately, the reality in media indicates the predominance of sexist language and traditional behavioral patterns for men and women. It is appreciated how the subjects are transformed into objects of power and pleasure, awakening the hedonistic thinking of consumers. In this context, the social construction of masculinity for television is associated with protection, bravery, intelligence, leadership, distinctive and rich, which have codes of behavior and ways of being that maintain the most classical masculinity (Metz, 2009).

In Mexican television, especially in soap operas, series and talk shows, the male figure responds to specific stereotypes: the good and successful are generally subjects with attractive personality, often physically handsome, strong voice, tall, usually white or light brown complexion, in good shape, with aesthetically developed muscles, which represent the traditional ideal of *the* western contemporary man. While men who represent problems or occupy less privileged spaces, are projected as less attractive subjects, with not so graceful bodies, and a series of difficulties for human relationships.

It also reflects the traditional figure of the strong man, macho, heterosexual, homophobic, conqueror and foul; as well as the effeminate man, ridiculed with actions that suggest that every male with female characteristics is homosexual, and in turn, that every homosexual male behaves like a woman.

It is clear that television reproduces stereotypes, assessments that are permeated by the population due to their passivity of reception; this means that rural masculinities, those of the elderly, indigenous people, dissidents, to name a few, have little or no place in the television industry, and if there are any, they are undervalued.

Such an assertion represents one more conflict in gender issues, because this medium reinforces the inequality between men and women, linking the male being with expressions of physical strength, when in reality, it is a social construct that allows a range of forms for the behavior and experience of being masculine.

When projecting figures that do not correspond to the reality of the majority of the men who inhabit this country, there is the possibility that television messages cause cognitive conflict, that is, of thought content, between those who make and consume such messages.

In addition, it is identified that when the male figure is limited to abuse of power, articles 5 and 63 of the Federal Radio and Television Law[5] are

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5   The Federal Radio and Television Law was enacted in 1960 during the six-year term of Adolfo López Mateos; its most recent reform was in 2012.

violated. The 5th refers to the social function of television to improve the forms of human coexistence, among others, through respect for morals, human dignity and family ties; in addition to the avoidance of harmful or disruptive influences to the harmonious development of children and youth. The 63rd prohibits all transmissions that cause the corruption of language and contrary to good customs, whether through malicious expressions, words or sassy images, phrases and scenes of double meaning, apology of violence or crime.

When analyzing the behavior of the male figure projected by television, the moral transgression is appreciated (when the married male character is emotionally and sexually linked with more than two women outside the family institution) and human dignity (when presented to a man who is subjected to complicated tests to prove his manhood); In addition, obscene language and violence against others alter the use of language and break with what is considered good manners.

The misrepresentation that television makes of the male figure contributes to establishing a conflict scenario. Perhaps studying men from a historical, biological and cultural perspective has had greater retribution and support than studying women, but it is a reality that in studies about them they are presented as victimizers.

Without debating that role that by tradition and imposition[6] the male has, it is necessary to clarify that the configuration of the male as a male subject should not be limited, let alone affirm that there is only one masculinity. The human being has the right to openly enjoy his existence as he likes, as long as it does not cause discomfort to those around him; women have the same right to openly enjoy their existence as such.

The decisions of being imply the existence of masculinities and feminities, which should be openly reflected by the media, and avoid those limitations of social construction with respect to men and women with stereotypes that only transgress plurality and freedom.

The one that projects a masculinity and not the masculinities, and the one that distorts the experience of the men who identify themselves as masculine and/or as feminine, violates Human Rights because finally man and woman, masculine and feminine, are human beings with decision capacity

The right to equality is also added because television language symbolizes the inequality and discrimination that exists, not only between men and

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6   By tradition because since ancient times men have been considered synonym of power, and by imposition because society assigns them the power to command; this is like expressing that men are violently destined to be violent.

women, but between men and between women; among teenagers, adults and older adults; between individuals from rural and urban areas, between professions, between trades, between diverse activities.

The right to freedom, both personal and sexual, is limited because the existence of prejudice causes social criticism towards the particular decision to be a person; and collective rights are violated by violating peace and freedom to be different. The single projection of the male figure that reproduces patterns of behavior associated with machismo contributes to these violations.

IV. MEDIATION OF THE MEDIA AND THE MESSAGE

The media responds to minority interests because it is the order of the spheres of power. Consumers are seen as passive entities that are easy to manipulate, which will not put any obstacles in absorbing intentionally selected messages as merchandise.

In this context, the transmission of the conceptualized male figure in a patriarchal society will boost the reproduction of hegemony among the subjects, which for the gender perspective represents a conflict. If such a situation is not recognized as such, the social practices of intolerance and discrimination will be maintained.

To avoid the above, it is required that the conflict be recognized by the parties involved, which would represent a first step towards the search for agreements that reduce and/or eliminate the negative effects of the dispute.

This possibility of change requires the responsible participation of those who elaborate and consume the message, and seek the most appropriate means to join efforts aimed at improving gender relations.

If such an approach is appreciated from alternative justice, social justice would be equivalent to the television message that responds to the daily life of men and women in the country, and the most feasible channels to reach an agreement, the alternative methods of conflict resolution.

Cornelio (2014) defines alternative means as various procedures by which people can resolve their disputes, without the need for jurisdictional intervention; such methods are: mediation, negotiation, conciliation and arbitration. The people who participate in these systems can be physical or moral, who voluntarily seek the agreement without attending the courts, which allows faster solution.

In the case of the male figure as a conflict, originated by the television industry, the participation of the medium and the receiver is required to seek the balance of the message (the male figure that responds to all the possibilities of being male). The application of alternative methods of conflict resolution, specifically of mediation, represents an alternative for intervention.

For González (2010) mediation is defined as the structured procedure in which two or more parties in conflict voluntarily attempt to reach an agreement on the resolution of their differences with the support and/ or help of a mediator. Aladro (2004) considers that mediation by itself is communication, and when communication occurs, two positions that were disconnected are linked, through a symbiosis between a message and a way of transmitting it, which has created the right channel to do so.

> Mediations are places from which the constraints that delimit and configure the social materiality and expressive culture of television come from (...) Loaded both by the transnationalization processes and by the emergence of new social subjects and cultural identities, communication is becoming a strategic space from which to think about the blockages and contradictions that energize these crossroads societies, halfway between accelerated underdevelopment and compulsive modernization (Martín-Barbero, 1991: 203).

This means that the different spaces where men and women develop give meaning to communication, which, as an exchange process that involves the social context, constructs codes of behavior.

> The same means and their intrinsic characteristics, political and economic determinations, their logics of production and transmission, their loyalties and styles, are a mediation. As are the same audiences, always located, both as members of a culture and several interpretation communities, as well as individuals with specific development, repertoires, mental schemes and scripts for their social performance (Orozco, 1997).

Mediation requires the participation of those involved in the conflict and the figure of a mediator, who is an impartial subject that functions as a channel for the message that the parties issue regarding the dispute, in order to voluntarily reach a total solution or partial to it.

Of the types of mediation, cognitive mediation is resumed because it is the one that seeks to transform the cognitive structures of the subjects. Martín (1985) considers that cognitive mediation provides members of society with stories in which an interpretation of the environment (material, social, ideal) and what happens in it is proposed. Such narratives relate the events that occur with the ends and beliefs in whose preservation certain social groups are interested.

In this article, the social construction of masculinity that is broadcast on television is considered a conflict, so cognitive mediation of the media is necessary in order to transform the means and the message. The suggestion is that television reconstructs the background of the male figure to enable

the cognitive change of the receivers with respect to what is transmitted, especially since television is a channel of impact among the population.

> It seeks to generate new meanings. In this sense, it ceases to be a passive link in the transmission of some constant information between input (sender) and output (receiver). Such is essentially the function of a dialogue as a thinking device. The dialogic function tends to dynamism, heterogeneity and conflict between voices. Instead of trying to receive meanings that reside in the statements of the speakers as something provided by the conduit metaphor, the focus is on how an interlocutor can use texts as if they were thinking devices and respond to them in a way that generates new meanings (Cesca, 2014: 3).

These new meanings in the television message will depend to a large extent on the disposition of those who make the medium, to stick to reality without altering it.

Mediation of the media is proposed as a theory that involves the study of the production, transmission and use of culture, from the analysis of cultural models and their functions; and of the use of this mediation as a procedure of domination or social control influencing people's conscience (Cuchillo, 2009).

It is perhaps utopian that the communicative medium in a capitalist economic system such as that prevailing in western culture, transform its content to respond more to social interests than individuals, but if awareness of the impact that gender-related messages have on the society, surely there will be greater awareness of the need for joint participation of various actors to have a more democratic society.

DISCUSION

Mediation of the media and the message regarding the televised male figure represents an opportunity to transform the conception of masculinity in Mexico. This requires the voluntary participation of social actors who are willing to build a plural society, not only in name but also in action that responds to the demands for recognition of differences.

The reflection from the gender perspective that has been made about the male figure, allows us to identify the need for a cultural industry more committed to the population, which contributes to gender equality and the promotion of healthy human relations.

It also requires the thorough reflection of the masculinity construct which leads to its reconstruction, in order to understand that this social category is not exclusive to men, in addition to the fact that the human being has the right to live his nature as a man to his free decision even when

such experience is contrary to what is socially established for men, without implying his own devaluation.

Change of thought regarding the experience of masculinity is a possible but long and complex process; it depends on everyone, not just men because men and women shape social reality. In this dynamic the participation of the media is necessary; as stated by Cuchillo (2009), the task of the media is to establish the appropriate frameworks for social agents to place themselves in change.

Making television as a means of communication as a social service, not as a way of manipulating the elites, but as channels of rapprochement between the differences, will allow a path to mediate the media and the message.

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